

Chapter 12

In Chapter 12, Saint strolls through the quiet, aging streets of Rosewood Avenue, her eyes tracing the worn and dilapidated grandeur of the homes that line it. The Macauley house catches her attention, its façade marred by an eerie symbol: a skull and crossbones etched deeply into an oak tree. The sight gives her an unsettling feeling, one that's difficult to shake as she passes by, her thoughts mingling with the eerie silence that surrounds the house. The sound of her footsteps echoes in the empty street, highlighting the absence of life in the area. Her mind wanders to the unfinished tasks she's witnessed recently, such as the neglected work of Mr. Hawes, as well as the forgotten jump rope of the Atkinson twins, which only seems to amplify her feeling of isolation. With every step, she's increasingly drawn to the house, as though something deep within it is beckoning her to understand its secrets.

Upon reaching the door, she's greeted by Ivy Macauley, who stands dressed in a revealing, slightly worn outfit, indicative of her family's difficult financial situation. Despite her attempts to maintain a facade of composure, Ivy's appearance suggests a deeper, unspoken struggle. Their conversation begins under a veil of tension, and the quiet, persistent drip of a faucet seems to mirror the uneasy rhythm of their interaction. Saint mentions the forthcoming search team expected to investigate the house, a prelude to the uncertainty surrounding her brother, Patch. The mention of Patch's theft of gold cufflinks brings a deepened sense of foreboding, as the theft only adds to the troubling developments surrounding the boy. At only thirteen, Saint is acutely aware of how her life is unfolding into a whirlwind of confusion and concern, and her worries about Patch only intensify as the weight of their circumstances continues to press down on her.

Ivy, lighting a cigarette, speaks with a cool and cynical edge, her hardened beauty betraying the experiences that have shaped her into the person she's become. As she

talks about the missing girls in the community, the conversation shifts from idle chatter to the more sinister and real threats that young women face in their town. Saint is struck by the starkness of Ivy's words, as they hint at the dark realities that have yet to affect her directly but are always lurking just out of reach. Ivy expresses her desire to join the search for the missing girls, though she's dismissed by her guardian, Nix, raising questions about the motivations and hidden agendas at play. Despite this dismissal, Ivy's words carry an underlying message about the vulnerability of women in their world, and the caution that must be exercised in order to protect oneself from those who would do harm. Ivy's insight into the dangerous realities of their environment becomes a wake-up call for Saint, as she begins to realize how naïve she's been about the world around her.

As the conversation continues, Saint finds herself both uncomfortable and fascinated by Ivy's raw honesty. When Ivy casually swears, Saint feels a mix of surprise and embarrassment, which amplifies the growing tension between her own childhood innocence and the harshness Ivy represents. The dichotomy between their worlds becomes more apparent as Ivy, with a motherly gesture, reties Saint's braid, a subtle yet poignant act that conveys both care and the weight of unspoken expectations. Ivy reassures Saint about the safety of Patch, but Saint is left wondering whether her reassurance is based on truth or mere wishful thinking. The fragility of their lives is reflected in Ivy's words and actions, as Saint struggles to come to terms with the complexities of adulthood that she's being forced to confront. Ivy's attempt to comfort her contrasts sharply with the tension that continues to build in the atmosphere around them, as Saint remains caught in the limbo between childhood and the painful truths of adulthood.

As their time together draws to a close, Saint is left with more questions than answers, feeling an ever-deepening sense of uncertainty about her future. Ivy's reassurances about Patch provide a temporary sense of relief, but they cannot fully erase the nagging feeling that something far more sinister is at play. Saint realizes that her life has been shaped by a series of external forces she can't fully control, and she must learn to navigate the complexities of relationships, danger, and trust. The chapter

underscores the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness Saint feels as she grapples with the harsh realities of life, all while struggling to hold on to the innocence that seems to be slipping away. As she watches Ivy, with her own burdens and wisdom, Saint comes to understand that the world is not as simple as she once believed, and that the transition from childhood to adulthood is filled with painful revelations and hard lessons learned.

